

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 04363 201731Z

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 FRB-03

INR-07 NSAE-00 TRSE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03 SP-02 CIEP-01

LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 NSC-05 SS-15 STR-01 CEA-01 L-02

H-02 PA-01 PRS-01 USIA-06 /083 W

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R 201718Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9482

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

USMISSION OECD PARIS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: UK,EEC

SUBJECT: WILSON LOSING HIS GRIP ON LABOR PARTY'S
MANAGEMENT OF EC ISSUE

SUMMARY. THE ANTI-MARKETEERS HAVE DEMONSTRATED UNEXPEC-
TED STRENGTH AMONG LABOR MPS, AND ARE THREATENING TO
COMMIT THE LABOR PARTY ITSELF TO CAMPAIGNING AGAINST THE
LABOR GOVERNMENT'S RECOMMENDATION. WILSON'S RELUCTANCE
TO IMPOSE NORMAL DISCIPLINE ON HIS CABINET HAS GIVEN THE
ANTI-MARKETEERS AN OPENING THEY ARE SKILLFULLY EXPLOITING.
THE DEVELOPING SITUATION HAS POTENTIALLY GRAVE CONSEQUENCES
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PAGE 02 LONDON 04363 201731Z

FOR WILSON'S OWN POSITION AS LEADER. END SUMMARY.

1. ANTI-MARKETEERS IN THE LABOR PARTY HAVE QUICKLY AND ADROITLY MOVED TO WREST FROM PRIME MINISTER WILSON THE INITIATIVE ON THE EC MEMBERSHIP ISSUE. IMMEDIATELY IN THE WAKE OF WILSON'S ANNOUNCEMENT THAT HIS CABINET HAD ENDORSED THE RENEGOTIATED TERMS AND WOULD RECOMMEND TO THE BRITISH ELECTORATE A FAVORABLE VOTE IN THE REFERENDUM, FIVE OF THE SEVEN DISSENTING CABINET MEMBERS VOTED DOWN AN EARLY DAY MOTION OPPOSING THE GOVERNMENT'S RECOMMENDATION. THE MOTION HAS ALREADY ATTRACTED ABOUT 140 SIGNATURES INCLUDING THOSE OF TWO DOZEN MINISTERS AND WHIPS, AND THE TOTAL IS CLIMBING TOWARDS A MAJORITY (159) OF THE LABOR PARTY'S ENTIRE PARLIAMENTARY CONTINGENT.

2. EMBOLDENED BY THIS EVIDENCE OF SUPPORT 18 OF THE 29 MEMBERS OF THE PARTY'S NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (NEC) GAVE NOTICE YESTERDAY (MARCH 20) THAT THEY WOULD SPONSOR AN NEC MOTION RECOMMENDING TO THE FORTHCOMING SPECIAL PARTY CONFERENCE THAT THE PARTY SHOULD CAMPAIGN FOR UK WITHDRAWAL FROM THE EC. THE MOTION, WHICH WAS SIGNED BY THREE CABINET MINISTERS (BENN, FOOT AND CASTLE), AND TWO JUNIOR MINISTERS (JUDITH HART AND JOAN LESTOR) WILL BE CONSIDERED BY THE NEC AT ITS NEXT MONTHLY MEETING ON MARCH 26.

3. COMMENT: THE ANTI-MARKETEERS' ASTONISHING DEMONSTRATION OF STRENGTH AND THEIR APPARENT READINESS TO STAND UP TO THE GOVERNMENT IN EARNEST ARE PROVING AN EMBARRASSMENT TO WILSON'S POSITION AS LEADER OF THE LABOR PARTY. IT WAS WIDELY ASSUMED BY PRO-MARKETEERS, AND PRESUMABLY BY WILSON HIMSELF, THAT ONCE THE CABINET HAD PRONOUNCED IN FAVOR OF STAYING IN THE EC, THE MIDDLE GROUP OF UNCOMMITTED LABOR MPS WOULD LINE UP BEHIND THE GOVERNMENT, AND THAT THE FINAL DIVISION IN THE PLP WOULD BE ROUGHLY FIVE TO THREE IN FAVOR OF STAYING IN THE EC. THIS CALCULATION SERIOUSLY UNDERESTIMATED THE PULL OF ANTI-MARKET SENTIMENT WITHIN THE PARTY. GIVEN LICENSE BY THE PM TO DISAGREE, MANY MPS HAVE FOUND IT POLITICAL TO CAST THEIR LOT WITH THE ANTI-MARKETEERS. WE HAVE BEEN INFORMED THAT CALLAGHAN AND OTHERS ARE NOW DESPERATELY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 LONDON 04363 201731Z

STRIVING TO HALT THE 495, BUT MUCH OF THE DAMAGE HAS ALREADY BEEN DONE.

4. THE EMBARRASSMENT CAUSED BY HAVING HALF THE PLP ON RECORD AS OPPOSED TO A CABINET RECOMMENDATION IS SMALL COMPARED TO THE PROSPECT, POSED BY THE NEC MOTION, OF THE LABOR PARTY MACHINERY IN THE COUNTRY AT LARGE BEING MOBILIZED TO CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE RECOMMENDATION OF A

LABOR GOVERNMENT. WHILE IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN ACCEPTED THAT THE SPECIAL CONFERENCE, DOMINATED BY THE TRADE UNIONS, WOULD GO ON RECORD AS OPPOSING EC MEMBERSHIP, IT WAS EXPECTED THAT THE PARTY AS A PARTY WOULD REMAIN NEUTRAL IN THE REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN. WILSON WILL NOW HAVE TO FIGHT HARD TO GAIN EVEN THAT. IT IS ALL WELL AND GOOD FOR HIM TO ASSERT THAT HE WILL NOT REGARD A NEGATIVE REFERENDUM OUTCOME AS CAUSE FOR RESIGNATION, BUT IF HE IS REPUDIATED BY HIS OWN PARTY AND THEN NOT VINDICATED BY THE ELECTORATE, THERE IS A REAL QUESTION HOW MUCH AUTHORITY HE WOULD CONTINUE TO HAVE AS PRIME MINISTER.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, POLITICAL PARTIES, PARTY LEADERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 20 MAR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975LONDON04363
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750098-0907
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750333/aaaabdbj.tel
Line Count: 126
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <15 APR 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <16 APR 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: WILSON LOSING HIS GRIP ON LABOR PARTY'S MANAGEMENT OF EC ISSUE
TAGS: PINS, PINT, UK, EEC, (WILSON, HAROLD)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006